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INTERCESSION
FOR
THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

*AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE
EUCCHARISTIC SACRIFICE*

A SERMON

PREACHED BY

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DEAN OF LICHFIELD

AT

THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE,
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SERMON.

INTERCESSION FOR THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE.

THE President of the Union, in inviting me to preach, pressed the need at this time of enforcing distinctly and definitely the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. I have gladly yielded to his wish, as far as my powers enable me, only adding a direct application, by pleading its efficacy for those upon whom our thoughts are fixed to-day. Some of his words I am constrained to quote.

“The misery is that there should be such widespread ignorance of this doctrine—that people either ignore it altogether, or else persist that the Church of England has some special Eucharistic doctrine of its own.”

I purpose to show, from historic evidence, that we have no such insularity, but that through all the stress and strain of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we never lost the ancient and primitive principle.

If I seem to do this with a simplicity that you will almost resent, I would have you bear in mind that it is only to help you more easily to teach others that of which you yourselves have no manner of doubt.

I divide my subject into two parts, the first “The Eucharistic Sacrifice”; the second “Eucharistic Intercession for the Departed.”

In the forefront let us place the continuity of the Jewish and Christian Churches, which is such that we may speak of them as One. If there is any change in doctrine it is in the sense of development; "I came not," said our Lord, "to destroy but to fulfil," literally, "to fill up."

Now we look for the first sign of unity in "the one Church" in its worship. No one doubts what it was under the Old Dispensation. "Sacrifice" was the only means of approach to God for sinful man. The system unfolded in Leviticus appears very complex, but a careful study resolves all sacrifices into three orders, under the heads of "Burnt-offering," implying the complete dedication of self to God; "Sin-offering," having for its dominant idea propitiation, effected through blood shed by the offerer, but pleaded by the Priest; "Peace-offering," symbolizing communion with God.

There is no necessity to remind you that all of these were types of Christ's Sacrifice, but I must emphasize the fact that, inasmuch as He instituted a service to be a perpetual "Memorial before God" of that Sacrifice, this also would naturally be sacrificial in character. Thus it has been well said of the Holy Eucharist, by the Evangelical author of "Church Doctrine Bible Truth," "it was instituted at a sacrificial time, in sacrificial terms, and for a sacrificial end." And so the Church has interpreted it, in all the centuries, with, it is true, varying vicissitudes of waxing and waning clearness, but with a belief never lost.

Now seeing that the Primitive Church has always been held up as our standard of doctrine and practice, we turn at once to the evidence of the Early Fathers, and we find a whole chain of passages from St. Clement to St. Leo, and onward, testifying to the continued use of such suggestive terms as Altar, Priest, Oblation, and Sacrifice, as applicable to Christian worship. The same were freely adopted also in the Liturgies, which are usually the best exponents of contemporary belief.

But there is so little doubt about the testimony of this period that I pass to the great upheaval in worship which came upon the Church in this country in the sixteenth century. No fault can be found touching the sacrifice of the Eucharist in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. It places it in the clearest light. In its title the Order is identified with the Mass; the celebrant is a Priest; that on which the Oblation is laid is an Altar; and for more definite teaching, it says that "Jesus Christ commanded us to celebrate with His holy gifts," the Memorial "which He willed us to make, having in remembrance His blessed Passion"; and it embodies in "the Prayer of Oblation" an exact description of the three typical sacrifices: "mercifully to accept this our Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," a title associated again and again in Leviticus with the peace-offering; "to grant that by the merits and death of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and through faith in His Blood, we and all Thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion," which takes us back at once to the sin-offering of the Day of Atonement, made by the transgressor, and its blood pleaded for the forgiveness of the sins of all by the High Priest, the whole congregation joining in the intercession by virtue of their priesthood; and, thirdly, the burnt-offering, described in the very language which a Jew would have used: "here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice."

So far all that was primitive and essential was preserved; but three years later great changes were introduced, owing to the interposition of Anti-Catholic Reformers from the Continent, but save in one particular they only indirectly, though very seriously, traversed the sacrificial doctrine. They omitted a prayer that those who partook of the Sacrifice might be worthy to receive the most precious Body and Blood; and they made no reference to the Body and Blood of Christ in the words of

administration ; less seriously, by substituting "table" or "God's board" for altar.

There is no question that in their wish to reinstate the act of Communion which had been neglected they went perilously near to obliterating the Sacrificial aspect ; but inasmuch as, probably through ignorance of their liturgical significance, they left in "the Prayer of Oblation" the application of the three great typical Jewish Sacrifices to the Christian service, the result of their revision did no more than overshadow it.

The mind of the Foreign Reformers had not been cast in a liturgical mould ; and it is probably owing to this that in the Providence of God the primitive doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, even at the most revolutionary epoch, was not left without this witness.

Now we know what violent attacks upon Catholic principles have been persistently made of late, especially touching sacerdotalism, and what is stigmatized as "the doctrine of the Mass."

I think it may help you to repel them, if I reply specifically to some of the chief arguments that are used by the objectors. The first is this:—

"In the Christian Church there is no sacrificing Priest." Now what do they mean ? Some, at any rate, have in their mind the Priest of the Old Dispensation, and are under the mistaken idea that his chief function was to slay the victim.

To give one illustration from the late Dean Stanley, whose lectures at Oxford attracted so much attention. In his exposition of the nature of the Jewish priesthood, he asserted that moral and intellectual qualifications were of only secondary importance. What was first needed was "the robust frame . . . the quick eye, and ready arm, which could strike the fatal blow" ; and again, "Butcher and Priest," he said, "are now the two extremes of the social scale. A fine moral lesson is involved in the fact that they were once almost identical !"

The unfairness of this description lies in the fact that an exceptional case is taken as though it were the normal function.

The fundamental principle of sacrifice was that the offerer, not the Priest, should take the life of the victim ; it was his acknowledgment that his own life, for which it was the substitute, had been forfeited by his sin. The distinctive duty of the Priest was to take some drops of the blood which " makes atonement for the soul " (A. V.), or " by reason of the life " (R. V.), and plead by it for the forgiveness of the offerer's sins. Ezekiel speaks of killing the victim as a punishment for certain Priests who had been degraded for idolatry.

Seeing now that there is no more shedding of blood, it is the office of the Priest to celebrate " the Memorial of Christ's Sacrifice offered once for all on the Cross, and to plead before God its all-sufficient virtue.

Another objection is that the only priesthood acknowledged in the New Testament is that of the baptized. St. Peter and St. John spoke of these as " a royal," or " holy priesthood," or as " Priests unto God " ; but they were quoting God's language to the Jews, within whose general priesthood there was an inner circle of ministering Priests with special functions, guarded from invasion by the rest, by the penalty of death. That the Apostles intended not a partial, but a complete analogy is shown by St. Jude, who says that this very punishment was meted out to some, who must have usurped what were inalienable privileges of a special priesthood ; for, it is said, " they perished in the gainsaying of Core."

Another common objection is that " Christ is the only Priest in His Church," which is true, but not as they understand it. It is not realized that Christ was the antitype of the priesthood both of Aaron and of Melchizedek. As the former He entered into the Presence of the Father " by His own Blood," to present to Him His own Sacrifice, and though no words were

spoken, no uttered intercession made, He has been constantly pleading its efficacy ever since for the sins of the world. This was the crowning service of the Aaronic Priesthood; and Christ continues it in Heaven; and has commanded a human priesthood as His representatives to do the same on earth.

His fulfilment of the priesthood of Melchizedek was begun at the Institution of the Eucharist; when He took "Bread and Wine," such as Melchizedek had offered, declared them to be His Body and Blood, and gave them separately, signifying thereby that they were to be offered in memorial of His death, by which they were separated. This Priesthood Christ does not exercise in Heaven; only through the co-operation of a human priesthood on earth is it possible for Him to fulfil the prophecy that He should be "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," of whom the only recorded priestly oblation is that he "brought forth bread and wine."

However, before leaving these objections, it is well to point out that, after all, our belief or disbelief in the Eucharistic Sacrifice does not depend merely on the terms that are used in speaking of it. The title of Priest does not, of necessity, connote sacrifice, for it may be only an abbreviation of "presbyter"; neither, if we designate the celebrant a "minister," do we deny that what he does is a sacrificial act.

Some of you will remember how forcibly the great German dramatist expressed this when he put into the mouth of the Impersonation of Satan advice to this effect: In dealing with theological subjects lay great stress upon names and take no notice of facts.

There can be no doubt, unhappily, that the doctrine of Eucharistic Sacrifice was over-shadowed at the Reformation, but it is equally clear that it was never obliterated; and that, because it lay embedded in the very structure of the service, which was laid down on the lines of the Primitive Liturgies. When the Protestants

rose to power under Cromwell, they realised the futility of all that had been done by changing its phraseology; and they determined on the only radical course for accomplishing their end; they prohibited the use of the Prayer Book altogether under the severest pains and penalties.

It was only then during the brief space of the Puritan Ascendency that the Church in this country forfeited the right to enjoy its historic heritage; and then, through oppression and violence from without, not from any authorized concession from within.

We pass now to the second aspect of our subject, "Eucharistic Intercession for the departed." You must often have followed in thought beyond the grave those Members of the Union who shared with you on earth your hopes and endeavours to recover long-neglected privileges of the Church; and now you want to join them in prayer through the Communion of Saints in the fresh atmosphere of their new surroundings.

You are now gathered here, Priests and Laity, to do this on your part in God's appointed way, by pleading at His Altar the All-sufficient Sacrifice, the virtue of which reaches alike to the dead and the living.

Time will not allow me to prove at any length that this has been the Church's belief and practice all through the centuries. The evidential history is as complete as that for the Church's Sacrifice; and this is naturally to be expected, seeing that intercession is an essential part of it. It will suffice to assert before you that from almost the earliest of the Fathers to the latest of the primitive Liturgies there is an abundance of testimony in support of it.

If we pass over several centuries of the mediæval history, it is only because it is still the same, and is nowhere doubted. But it is necessary to test the validity of the oft-repeated assertion that, "though the practice may have been primitive and mediæval, it was deliberately rejected at the Reformation."

There is not even the semblance of truth in the statement as touching the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. We shall endeavour to show that in those which followed, though the practice was veiled and obscured, through the interposition of foreign and uncatholic Reformers, it was never prohibited or even wholly ignored.

Let me adduce three illustrations of its preservation ; one from the Burial Service, two from the Order of Holy Communion. I bring forward the former, because it fixes the meaning to be assigned to an analogous expression in the latter. In the First Prayer Book petitions for the departed were expressly so worded ; in the Second Book the language was modified, but the principle preserved.

Bishop Cosin, the leading compiler of our Prayer Book, in the large collection of notes on the whole subject which he made, evidently in view of the Revision he looked forward to, shows very clearly that it could not have been more than a modification. Thus of the words "That we with this our brother may have our perfect consummation and bliss, &c.," he writes :—"The Puritans think that here is prayer for the dead, allowed and practised by the Church of England, and so think I ; but we are not both of one mind in censuring the Church for so doing." The Protestant objection to which he calls attention is very significant, as showing that it was understood at the time to be a distinct prayer, as much as if it had been written that "we and our brother," &c.

With this commentary we turn to the corresponding expression in the Prayer for the Church Militant in our present Service : "We bless Thy Holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear, beseeching Thee that with them we may be partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom"; on the analogy of the previous interpretation, this, too, is equivalent to "that we and they"—a distinct prayer.

In the Second Prayer Book all such prayer was excluded from the General Prayer for the Church, not,

however, as is often supposed, because it was then headed "militant here in earth," but by the fact that it made no mention of the dead whatever!

At the final Revision this omission was rectified by adding the concluding clause as we now have it; and Bishop Cosin has shown us that it was so intended; and it is more than probable that, with his knowledge of ancient prayers, he left the heading as it was, because of a very striking resemblance it bore to a pre-Reformation prayer, in which the bulk of its petitions were for the living, but which concluded, as this does in effect, with a distinct supplication, that "all faithful people, whether alive or dead, might be granted eternal life and rest in the land of the living"; and this is the title it bore: "A General and Devout Prayer for the Good Estate of our Mother the Church, Militant here on Earth."

Now we pass to a third witness to the preservation of the principle, and that the most conclusive, not only because its very uncommon phraseology would otherwise be most perplexing, but chiefly because Cosin himself strongly confirms it.

Speaking of the clause in the Prayer of Oblation, "That by the merits and death of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and through faith in His Blood, we and 'all Thy whole Church' may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion," he says, "This is a plain oblation of Christ's Death, once offered, and a representative sacrifice of it, for the sins of the whole Church, that both those which are here on earth and those that rest in the sleep of peace may find the effect and virtue of it." And he repeats the same later at great length. We have then in this, at the very time that the Oblations are lying on the Altar, an all-embracing intercession. It would lay a tremendous strain on our credulity to be asked to believe that this reference to the Jewish sacrifice was accidental or figurative only.

It was inserted in the First Prayer Book, and it was

happily preserved as a safeguard of the principle through all the revisions that followed. Cosin and his colleagues coming to their work so shortly after the Protestant supremacy retained all that they could; and they have been careful to leave it on record for future guidance, that little as it was, it preserved the great principle of Eucharistic intercession. If I seem to have laboured this subject too much in detail, it is in view of repudiating by positive and historic disproof the unjustifiable charge that in teaching this doctrine and practice some of our most devoted Priests have been guilty of disloyalty to the principles of the Prayer Book.

If again I seem to have exaggerated the importance of what is only scanty evidence, I would ask, what can be more scanty than that which we have in the New Testament for prayer for the departed? "The Lord grant unto Onesiphorus that he may find mercy in that day." It is only a single verse, and yet it sufficed for the Primitive Church to have it incorporated in her Liturgies as a frequent and favourite intercession for the departed. Even so with the clauses we have examined; though we could have wished for more, they have secured for us, through all the vicissitudes of the Reformation, a continuity of Catholic usage.

Now the practical question arises, what can we do to help in winning back the fulness of our diminished inheritance? Let me suggest two ways.

First, by trying to multiply such anniversary services as this, especially for departed members of guilds, confraternities, and other religious communities, and by doing it with authority, *i.e.*, episcopal sanction. If it is found to be a real and widespread want, and that it will be, if we of the Clergy teach our people, unless we are greatly mistaken few Bishops will withhold the power that many are ready to believe is inherent in the Episcopate, by virtue of the *jus Liturgicum*, to sanction special services, which are quite outside the Act of Uniformity. Some few

of the best of our brethren, I know, think differently about the necessity of obtaining this sanction; but surely it must be better, according to the primitive rule, to "do nothing without the Bishop," than to claim the right of private judgment, which has wrought so much mischief in the Church, and which is alien to the constitution and well-being of the Body of Christ.

At the present critical juncture it is suggested a remedy may be found for our grievance in another way, which seems to many of us bristling with difficulty and fraught with peril. Is there no danger if, to satisfy the cravings of one's devout instincts, we ask Parliament, which is now showing itself not very well-disposed to the Church, for bread that it may give us a stone or possibly a scorpion? Dr. Pusey wrote to me shortly before his death: "Any revision, I believe, would rend our communion in two—our only hope, under God, is the bond of the Prayer Book as it is." They are words to be weighed at this time. We have persevered for years in our belief that we have in the Rubric all we require for the ornaments of the Church and Ministers, and at last the claim has been practically and publicly vindicated. We shall obtain the same liberty for additional Services if by our loyalty and moderation we can convince our Fathers in God that it will supply a deep spiritual need. Already some of the Bishops have gladly exercised their right—your own Bishop, for example—in satisfying our heart's desire for a Service for the Departed; other Bishops in providing special Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for a Celebration on many Black Letter Days in the Calendar. In Lichfield we have them authorized for upwards of twenty special days.

If in the former case (the Ornaments Rubric) some of us resisted authority, it is no inconsistency; it was because conscience absolutely forbade us to agree that "shall" could mean "shall not"; but there is no such difficulty about the necessity for Episcopal sanction in the case of special Services.

Then there is a second suggestion, which may help very largely to the ultimate attainment of our purpose. It is to press upon Priests and Laity the great desirability of having Funeral Celebrations. Let the Priest propose, or the Laity plead for them when they are about to commit their beloved dead to the grave.

If you compare our Burial Service with the other special offices you will see at a glance what a serious difference there is. Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Visitation of the Sick; there are prayers in abundance for the child to be baptized or confirmed; for those who desire to be joined together by an eternal bond; for one upon whom God's chastening hand has been laid; for one and all, intercession is not only an integral part, but, so to speak, the very breath of the Service, sanctifying with the Blessed Spirit those more immediately concerned. But in the Burial Service prayer becomes utterly selfish—"deliver *us* from the pains of eternal death"; "suffer *us* not at our last hour to fall from Thee." It is true we hear the voice of thanksgiving and hope, but how few, unfamiliar with the explanation I have given, ever realise that the words which follow, "that we with all those that are departed may have our perfect consummation and bliss," is a prayer for them as well as for ourselves!

It is from the desire to remedy this very serious defect that we wish to encourage what is practically the revival of the use of the First Prayer Book—viz., to have, where circumstances permit, a Celebration not only for the strength and comfort of the friends and relations, but pre-eminently for Eucharistic Intercession in behalf of the departed. No permission is required for this, there being no restriction laid upon any Parish Priest touching the number of Celebrations he may lawfully have. In case the scantiness of the Intercession contained in the letter of the Service seems hardly to meet the mourners' need, they have only to be reminded that it may be expanded at

the time in their private devotions, which are equally efficacious, if they are in accordance with God's will and blended with the All-prevailing pleading of Christ's own Sacrifice.

If we are contented to pray as the Early Church did, it will be for the peace of the departed—that peace which passeth all understanding; for his rest, which is not idleness but restful activity; for light, from the reflexion of that which no man can approach unto; for refreshment, in the Presence of Him Who promised it to all who should come to Him; for purification—that progressive process which everyone must pass through before he is fitted to “see God” in the Beatific Vision; and for the complete effacement of those spots and stains which sin cannot but leave even upon the purest soul. These and other such-like supplications will supply ample material for the fullest intercession.

And my last word shall be for encouragement. Whenever I think, as I often do, of the change that has come over England in our relation to the dead, I recall two remarkable letters that I received just twenty-eight years ago, from the most honoured Churchmen of the day. Dean Church wrote, full of hope, that one of the results of a calm and dispassionate examination of the primitive evidence, then lately set forth, for the legitimacy of the practice would be (to use his exact words) that “our children will be able to enjoy without offence a primitive liberty of prayer, which we, their fathers, could only do grudgingly and under suspicion.” Canon Liddon, almost in despair, asked “how long men would continue to go on appealing to antiquity, and not realize that prayers for the departed were almost as much a part of the life of the Early Church as the worship of our Lord?” Had they been alive to-day, how surprised both would have been! One would have said that his most sanguine expectations had been even exceeded; the other, that his indignation might have been spared, for when he wrote he little

thought he had actually reached the very dawn of returning day!

And now I pray you, my brethren in Christ, you who have recovered for the Church in this land so much of her ancient heritage, take heart of grace from this experience. You have seen the practice wonderfully revived in our private devotions; you will see the same in public worship; but be content to wait patiently upon His good pleasure, always confident in hope that if it be God's Will, "it will surely come," it may be, "it will not tarry."

By the Very Rev. H. MORTIMER LUCKOCK, D.D., *Dean of Lichfield.*

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